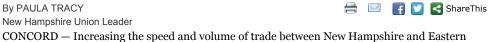


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## Business, political leaders address trade between New Hampshire and Eastern Canada at forum



Canada was the focus of a day-long forum Monday featuring business leaders from both sides of the border, including Gov. John Lynch, U.S. Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., and Canada Consul General Patrick Binns.

A number of state legislators came ready to talk about issues they see as impeding commerce, such as the need for better rail connections and speedier crossings. Others said they did not know what they could buy from Canada other than power and wood and that online communication could be better. Some discussed improving manufacturing options here and questioned why the mills and the turned-wood trade here have practically dried up.

Some 35,000 to 40,000 New Hampshire jobs are dependent on trade to Canada, according to state estimates. Michel Lefebvre, director of the Quebec Federation of Chambers of Commerce, which represents 60,000 businesses from banks to fishermen, said he would like to see a 10 percent increase in trade over the next three years. Exports from Quebec to New England are about \$8 billion and imports are about \$4 billion, he said during a panel discussion.

"You can do better. We can do better," Lefebvre said. "I love this English expression, 'you scratch my back and I scratch yours?' It must be American."

Four years ago, New Hampshire signed a trade agreement with Eastern Canada to accelerate commerce and maintain a dialogue.

George Bald, commissioner of the state Department of Resources and Economic Development, said economic conditions affected that agreement but that it was time to recommit.

"It is really important to think of renewing this relationship and putting a strong effort on it. We both need to understand what we need, and it will take some time," he said.

Increasing trade between the two regions, however, may mean making improvements to make doing so easier.

State Rep. Peter Schmidt, D-Dover, questioned whether addequate infrastructure is in place to provide for truck and rail traffic along New Hampshire's 58-mile border. Quebec's department of transportation is beginning to study that, said Marie-Claude Francoer, the Quebec delegate.

Peter Griffin, president of the N.H. Rail Revitalization Association, said the state has lost virtually all its 24 rail points between the state and Canada and lamented that more is not being done to





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improve the situation for commerce.

New Hampshire's number two export to Canada is raw timber, but the state is losing its hardwood milling capacity to Canada, said James Chapman, a forester from the Keene area.

"Right now we are losing... We are not adding value," he said.

According to a 2011 report by Northeast Foresters Association, wood flows into Canada were 127,055 tons from New Hampshire, last year, and wood flows from Canada into the state were 393 tons.

Peter Brown, an energy attorney with PretiFlaherty, said Canada has lower energy and employment costs, which make it hard to compete with the country's milling industry. While there could be room to improve the energy side, it would be harder when dealing with employment costs, he said.

Jim Roche, president of the N.H. Business and Industry Association, said a survey of members may be in order on the subject of Canada trade.

He noted, "we buy a lot of power from Canada" and mentioned the proposed Northern Pass Project proposed by Hydro-Quebec and Northeast Utilities.

NU, the parent company of Public Service Company of New Hampshire, was an underwriter of the conference, but the forum literature made no mention of Northern Pass, though it did address hydro power in Quebec.

State Rep. Roger Berube, D-Somersworth, took the microphone in the room of 200 and said the state needs Canada's energy, including Northern Pass. "We keep the focus all the time on the North Country," he said, referring to an area that largely opposes the project because of concerns for property values, scenery and tourism.

"There is a very small population in the North Country. Most people who are up there are not working in the factories because they are not there anymore....we should be focusing more on energy bringing in more of it to our state. If we don't start doing something we are going to have people leaving," Berube said.

Brown said the question is what energy source is sustainable and its cost.

"Those are difficult questions because natural gas...is the cheapest available for producing electricity. The question is can we get sustainable systems," he said.

Also discussed Monday was how an energy corridor could be developed without negatively impacting tourism. Canadians make about a million visits to the state a year.

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